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FM AMEMBASSY MADRID

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E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR

TAGS: PREL, SP, CR

SUBJECT: ARIAS VISIT TO MADRID - OFF TO A GOOD START

1. (LOU) SUMMARY: JUDGING FROM THE INITIAL PRESS AND TV COVERAGE, THE VISIT OF COSTA RICAN PRESIDENT OSCAR ARIAS HAS GOTTEN OFF TO A GOOD START. INTERVIEWS IN ADVANCE OF THE VISIT HELPED GET ARIAS' MESSAGE BEFORE THE SPANISH PUBLIC. THE VISIT WAS THE TOP STORY ON THE MAY 12 NATIONAL TV NEWS, AND FEATURED A FIVE-MINUTE LIVE INTERVIEW WITH ARIAS FROM THE PARDO PALACE. ARIAS AND SPANISH PRIME MINISTER FELIPE GONZALEZ TOOK A TWO-HOUR PRIVATE WALK THROUGH THE GARDENS OF THE MONCLOA PALACE ON THE AFTERNOON OF MAY 12, POSSIBLY THE MOST IMPORTANT DISCUSSIONS TO BE HELD DURING THE VISIT. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) COSTA RICAN PRESIDENT OSCAR ARIAS' VISIT TO MADRID, THE FIRST LEG OF HIS EUROPEAN TOUR, GOT OFF TO A GOOD START. ARIAS GRANTED INTERVIEWS TO TWO OF MADRID'S LEADING NEWSPAPERS,  
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CONSERVATIVE "YA" AND LIBERAL/LEFT "EL PAIS", BEFORE ARRIVING IN MADRID, THEREBY INSURING THAT HIS VIEW OF THE TRIP WAS LAID BEFORE SPANISH LEADERS AND THE SPANISH PUBLIC WELL IN ADVANCE OF THE VISIT. (SPANISH LANGUAGE TRANSCRIPTS FOLLOW SEPTTEL). HE HAS COMBINED PRAISE FOR SPAIN (REFERRING TO IT IN ONE INTERVIEW AS AN "EXCEPTIONAL INTERLOCUTOR"), WITH PLUGS FOR HIS PEACE PLAN. AS IS FREQUENTLY THE CASE IN ITS COVERAGE OF CENTRAL AMERICA, "EL PAIS" ACCENTUATED THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ARIAS AND THE UNITED STATES, REFERRING TO HIS DECISION "TO CLOSE THE SECRET AIR BASE WHICH OLIVER NORTH, GEN. SECORD, AND THE CIA WERE USING IN COSTA RICA TO SUPPLY THE CONTRAS." IT ALSO GAVE PROMINENCE TO HIS STATEMENT ON THE NICARAGUAN PRESENCE IN COSTA RICA: "I HAVE BEEN VERY INSISTENT THAT THE

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NICARAGUANS WHO LIVE HERE, WHO NUMBER NOT LESS THAN 150,000, NOT ABUSE THE HOSPITALITY OF OUR PEOPLE AND NOT USE OUR TERRITORY TO PLACE IN DANGER OUR NEUTRALITY. AND THIS CREATES A VERY GREAT DIFFERENCE WITH WASHINGTON, WHICH BELIEVES THAT THE WAY OUT IS TO KEEP EXERTING PRESSURE ON THE GOVERNMENT OF MANAGUA THROUGH THE CONTRAS. I DO NOT BELIEVE SO. AND MY ANSWER IS THE PEACE PLAN." (NOTE: "EL PAIS" ALSO BALANCED OFF ITS COVERAGE OF ARIAS BY PUBLISHING A LONG INTERVIEW WITH NICARAGUAN PRESIDENT ORTEGA ON MAY 10 -- REPORTED SEPTEL.)

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3. (U) ARIAS' ARRIVAL WAS THE TOP STORY ON THE MAY 12 NATIONAL TV NEWS, AND INCLUDED A LIVE, FIVE-MINUTE INTERVIEW FROM THE PARDO PALACE, THE OFFICIAL RESIDENCE FOR VISITING HEADS OF STATE. ARIAS HANDLED THE INTERVIEW WELL, INCLUDING ONE LOADED QUESTION ON COSTA RICAN DEPENDENCE ON THE US, WHICH HE TURNED ASIDE DEFTLY.

4. (U) THE MOST IMPORTANT MEETING OF THE ENTIRE VISIT PROBABLY TOOK PLACE ON MAY 12 AS WELL, AS ARIAS AND SPANISH PRIME MINISTER FELIPE GONZALEZ SPEND A FULL TWO HOURS WALKING

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IN THE GARDENS OF THE MONCLOA PALACE -- THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICIAL RESIDENCE -- WITHOUT THE PRESENCE OF ANY ADVISERS. NEITHER LEADER COMMENTED ON THEIR DISCUSSIONS TO THE PRESS. IN PUBLIC THE SPANISH GOVERNMENT HAS GIVEN THE ARIAS PEACE PLAN SUPPORT, BUT QUALIFIED IT BY SAYING THAT THE PLAN (AND SPANISH SUPPORT) IS "IN THE FRAMEWORK AND SPIRIT OF THE CONTADORA PROCESS, AND IS COMPATIBLE WITH IT."

5. (LOU) WE HAVE BEEN PROMISED A READOUT ON THE VISIT BY THE COSTA RICAN EMBASSY, WHICH WILL PROBABLY NOT BE POSSIBLE BEFORE MAY 18, AS ARIAS WILL BE IN MADRID UNTIL MAY 14, AND MAY 15 IS A HOLIDAY HERE.  
BARTHOLOMEW

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